

Q and A**1. Why are we replacing the FCAT?**

With new, more rigorous standards in place to help Florida students succeed, the FCAT 2.0 no longer serves the purpose of measuring student progress and achievement.

Commissioner Pam Stewart's top priority was to choose the best assessment for students, ensuring that the test replacing the FCAT 2.0 in the 2014-15 school year best serves Florida students by accurately measuring education gains and progress. To this end, the following goals were outlined in Governor Scott's Executive Order on September 23, 2013:

- Provide timely and informative reports of results;
- Do not significantly increase the overall cost of testing to the state, districts or schools;
- Allow students to test as late in the school year as possible;
- Measure student mastery of the standards taught;
- Provide a basis for comparing Florida performance to that of other states;
- Meet high quality standards for assessment, including reliability and validity for a variety of accountability purposes;
- Provide the flexibility necessary in order for schools and districts to build technology capacity; and,
- Include appropriate accommodations for exceptional students.

2. Why is this important to Floridians?

It is important that each and every child in this state have the opportunity to learn and succeed in college, career and in life. This new method of assessment will allow teachers to emphasize critical thinking, which will provide our students with even greater opportunities to live and learn in Florida. Business growth will continue as Florida graduates show the ability to be the best in the nation, providing a strong workforce in the nation's most desirable location to live, to work and to learn.

3. What changes will Florida students and teachers see? What are the benefits to students?

The new Florida Standards, adopted by the State Board of Education in February after unprecedented public input and review, will prepare Florida students for success in college, career and in life by emphasizing analytical thinking. The new test will provide a more authentic assessment of the Florida Standards, because it will include more than multiple choice questions. Students will be asked to create graphs, interact with test content and write and respond in different ways than on traditional tests. New question types will assess students' higher-order thinking skills in keeping with the higher expectations of the Florida Standards. This summer, students, educators and parents will be able to preview samples of new question types by taking practice tests that will be made available for anyone interested in reviewing them.

4. How does this affect school grades and teacher evaluations?

After the first administration of the Florida Standards Assessments in English language arts (ELA) and Mathematics in spring of 2015, the required standard-setting process will be

conducted in the summer of 2015 in order to set performance level expectations, also referred to as “cut scores.” This will provide a new baseline for school grading and other accountability measures which will more accurately reflect student performance on the new standards and assessments. This baseline, informational approach in the first year provides parents, schools, districts and all Floridians with a clear understanding of a student’s and a school’s starting point on the new, more rigorous standards and assessments.

During the 2014-15 school year, each school district will continue to set its own performance standards for teachers using data from the new assessment, to ensure continuity with the 2013-14 evaluations within each district.

5. Will students be required to pass the new assessments in order to meet promotion and graduation requirements?

The guidelines for promotion and graduation will remain largely the same. Students entering 3rd grade in 2014-2015, who have only been taught using the Florida Standards since kindergarten, will be required to achieve a certain score on the 3rd grade ELA assessment in order to meet promotion requirements. The score will be determined in the spring, ensuring that students are appropriately identified for retention or promotion. Students not meeting these criteria may still meet promotion requirements through any one of six good cause exemptions. None of that has changed.

Students entering 10th grade and/ or taking Algebra 1 in 2014-2015 will be required to achieve a certain score on the respective 10th grade ELA test and the Algebra 1 assessment in order to meet graduation requirements. These students will continue to have the opportunity for retakes that all students have had before. Students who need to retake an assessment based on an FCAT 2.0 score will be able to retake the FCAT 2.0.

6. Will the new assessment have been field tested prior to 2014-15?

Yes. The test questions that Florida students will see beginning in spring of 2015 will have been through all of the rigorous review processes currently used in large-scale assessment development. The questions will have been field tested and will have been reviewed for statistical quality prior to placement on the test. Florida educators and department staff will be closely involved in all test development activities, throughout the entire process from development to administration, to ensure that test questions meet Florida’s quality standards, reflect community expectations and are free of any type of bias.

7. Why was the American Institutes for Research (AIR) selected?

AIR is a not-for-profit organization that provides research, assessment services and technical assistance. AIR has been delivering online tests for more than seven years and will deliver such tests to nearly five million students across more than 20 states this spring.

The delivery system that AIR will provide is designed to work on all technological levels. The technology requires minimal bandwidth and minimal technical support in schools.

In addition, AIR will partner with Data Recognition Corporation (DRC) to develop test content and to score student responses. DRC has 30 years of experience in developing assessments and has successfully scored millions of student responses for large-scale statewide assessment programs across the nation.

8. Have AIR or DRC been involved in any activities related to other major assessment consortia?

As with every major contractor that has experience and expertise in large-scale assessments, (and every entity that submitted a response to the Invitation to Negotiate), both AIR and DRC have been involved in consortia work. However, the work that each of the contractors will be performing for Florida will be independent of any consortium work and performed with oversight by the Florida Department of Education. Their work is focused solely on fulfilling the department's requirements as related to this contract and on meeting the needs of Florida students.

9. Will any students be taking the FCAT 2.0 in 2014-15?

High school students trying to achieve the necessary score to graduate on their 10th grade Reading test will take the FCAT 2.0 to maintain consistency. The FCAT 2.0 science exam will be used in grades 5 and 8.

10. Will the tests that will be developed and administered under this contract cost less than what the state currently pays for comparable tests? Will they cost less than PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) or SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium)?

The cost per test and cost per student will decline.

Comparison of Total Costs for Statewide Assessments in All Subject Areas (English, Language Arts/Literacy, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies)		
	Current Costs	New Costs
Per Test	\$14.58	\$11.47
Per Student	\$36.17	\$34.23

The contract is for \$220 million over six years. The tests cost significantly less than the publicly reported costs projected for either PARCC or SBAC.